

supporting student participation

connect

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CONNECT

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- Sherbrooke Community School's Literacy Camp
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Connect

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Cover

Working and learning at the Island, Victoria.
See the article on page 3.

This Issue

A diverse issue - as ever - with accounts of student participation that emphasise that you often don't need a 'program' to support participation; student participation can (and should) be a general approach to education, the 'normal' basis for what we do, day by day.

So, here we read of the Island, a work education and training unit, that connects students who have rejected schools with a new approach to hands-on education, and to increased control over their own education and lives. Myuna Farm talks of various levels of participation, from taking part in activities designed by staff to the creation of new and valued community roles in an urban farm. And Sherbrooke Community School returns with another example of its educational approach - that links to the Literacy Camp model outlined by Lyn Loger in earlier issues. Finally, Peter Carey presents a more theoretical discussion of Student Councils.

Who reads Connect?

Who is **Connect** for? After all, there are articles by primary and secondary school students, and by teachers and academics. There are simple descriptions of programs, and more complex studies. **Connect** has always rejected the idea that it is a newsletter simply for students, or solely for support persons such as teachers. **Connect** is produced for **all** those involved with or interested in developing student participation - whether they be students active in determining their own education, or teachers supporting students, or consultants or researchers writing about student participation.

Hopefully, each issue of **Connect** carries some material of direct relevance to you. Hopefully, **Connect** provides a common ground where those with an active interest in this area - that's you - can speak together and find a common language.

We'd like to hear from you. Don't wait to be asked to contribute. Is **Connect** meeting your needs? What would you like to read about? What would you like to tell others about?

Next Issue

The next issue of **Connect** marks our 15th anniversary. Student participation ... 15 years on? What does it mean to you? Where has it come in 15 years? What have been the gains and losses?

What will student participation be like in another 15 years ... in 2010?

Please write! Publication date for **Connect 90** is December; deadline for copy is the end of November 1994.

Roger Holdsworth

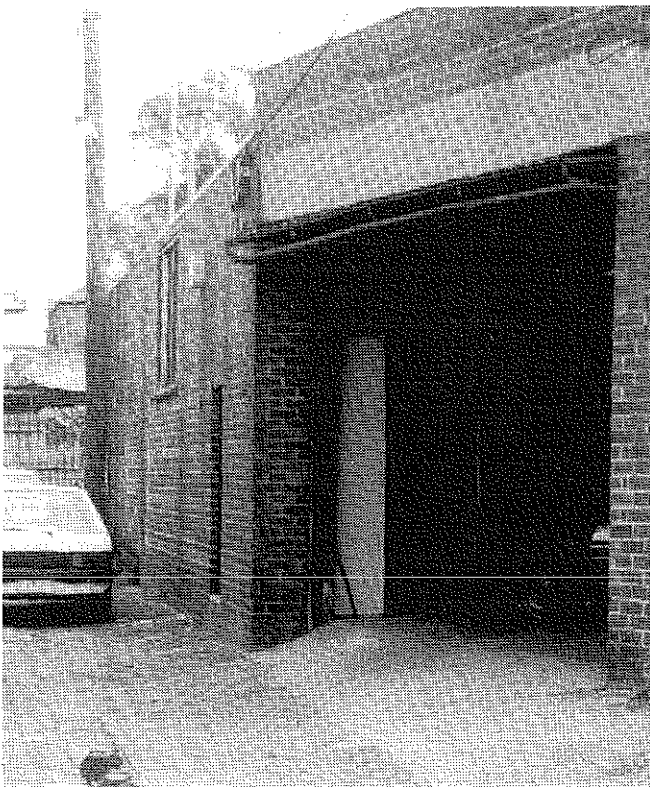
THE ISLAND

Work Education and Training Unit

There's an Island in a warehouse in a back lane in Melbourne's North Fitzroy. It's an Island that's a school - yet not like a school; it's a work site - yet specifically about educational opportunities for a group of 15 to 18 year olds.

As you walk down the lane, you reflect that this is a surprising location for an exciting educational initiative. Through the roller doors and into the open brick building, you're hit by the buzz of diverse activities - a group reassembling a car motor, some young people practising brick-laying, another group making furniture. And off to one side, others are cooking lunch for everyone, some are assembling a computer network, and others are writing advertisements.

The Island is the 'Work Education and Training Unit' of Collingwood College. At any one time there is an enrolment of approximately 30 students between the ages of 15 and 18 years. The group is mainly (85%) male at the moment; the Island's provision is inclusive of the needs of girls, the coordinator notes, but many schools do not appear to perceive the manual trades as being areas that meet girls' learning and training needs.



In fact, for many of these students, school has not been a positive experience:

I hated school and wanted to leave. I hated school from grade prep. The only practical subjects I was doing were Drivers Education, and Electrical - where I was the only girl in the class. I wasn't learning anything and hated writing. (Bandit)

Many of these students talk of a long interest in practical activities - they've been pulling the family car apart for years (though perhaps not putting it back together again), servicing bike engines, making things. But their schools haven't been able to build on these experiences and have often not offered them the practical, hands-on training they've desired. Subsequently they've resisted or rejected schooling, and have developed a history of disruptive behaviour and non-attendance.

The Island has been receiving a steady stream of enquiries and referrals from schools, from support agencies, from community groups and from families. (There were 143 enquiries for places to the end of term 3, 1994.) Acceptance of students by the Island directly reflects a student's commitment and desire to be there - it's finally not up to a third person such as a school or a parent to make the decision for them.

Once a student is accepted, the Island is less interested in the student's 'problems' and 'failures'; rather it seeks to define, with the student, what that person is good at and interested to do and achieve. The individual program is then negotiated around those abilities, interests and aspirations.

Background

The Island was initially established in 1980 on the philosophy that "young people needed to be given the opportunity to achieve success through their labour, and to use this to develop into productive young adults." The Island initially worked with a number of secondary schools in the area, and students attended for sessions in rotation.

In 1991, the Island became a full-time education and training program. It began to provide real hands-on training, using skills and technologies that apply to current industry practices. It undertook a mix of jobs - some generated internally (eg fixing cars that were donated or brought in) and others in the community.

The Island staff is a mix of teachers and instructors who have an industry background.

After a fire in 1992 that robbed them of their original building (an old kindergarten), they eventually relocated to this warehouse.

Why does the Island exist?

Many of the young people at the Island see formal education as artificial and irrelevant to their needs. They seek practical learning tasks and activities which they see as having connection to 'legitimate work'. They recognise the importance of education, but seek education and training which is 'hands on' and meaningful to their futures. They are the young people who, previously, left school at fifteen, but continued to learn at work and through apprenticeships.

The Island provides an environment in which young people can rediscover and take pleasure in their capacity to learn and to take charge of their lives. It aims to increase early school leavers' real options in their post-school lives, through matching skills and interests with on-going training or employment. This provides participants with bridges to apprenticeships, further training and credentials.

Learning on the job, supported by off-the-job training, is an established apprenticeship model, yet many of these students:

- have no clear idea of apprenticeships;
- have had their confidence to embark on apprenticeships undercut;
- need skill development.

In many ways, the Island provides students with the pre-apprenticeship training that will enable them to embark on successful programs. It continues to support them, particularly in TAFE studies.

MICHAEL

I've been here since the start of the year. Before that, I was at a normal school. I didn't like it there. I was there for half the year, but the last term I didn't go one day. I heard about the Island through a friend. I'm always here now.

Here, you can do what you want to do, sort of - work-wise. In mechanics, we get customers' cars coming in. We actually get to use our hands, instead of being pen-pushers. If you have a person that likes writing, they wouldn't like it here much, because you don't do much of that. People that don't like writing, they like it here - they like using their hands.

I'll be here a while, and then do an apprenticeship in motor mechanics - and then into a job.

The kids who come here, learn to become young adults. They take on responsibility. You're not being told what to do all the time.

How the Island works:

In the words of John, an instructor: "The Island provides real work for students; it provides them with trust and responsibility."

Teams work on various tasks - either inside the warehouse or in the community. These tasks reflect the interests of the students and, to some extent, the skills and experience of instructors. Currently, the Island offers introductory training in light and heavy motor mechanics, bricklaying, and carpentry. In addition, activities in health, nutrition, computing, performance arts and physical education are incorporated into group and individual programs.

Literacy, numeracy and other skills are offered on a one-to-one basis and integrated into the daily program. Involvement is driven by student recognition of their needs in this area or in alliance with practical activities. Carl (the teacher in this area) talked of one student who had initially refused to consider writing, but who recently approached him to make a regular time "because I'm going to need to be able to write and calculate if I'm going to get an apprenticeship."

Steve, one of the instructors, described this integrated approach:

For a person to be a tradesperson, they've got to have reasonable English and Maths. If they work for themselves, they've got to be able to put a quote together, and write that quote down in clear, plain English. I'll say to a student: 'Go and see Carl for some help', or if we're dealing with an estimates sheet, if they've got to price a certain job, they've got to structure that, they've got to be able to communicate verbally and in writing. I've given Carl a lot of our building notes, and orientation things we do when apprentices start. Students also have to write a report after each project. They then





come to Carl with the experience and the language, but not necessarily how to put it down, so Carl will then work with them to get what's in their head and the language that they've learnt down onto paper.

The nutrition program is again about reading, writing, budgeting, health. Again, it is all inter-related: they can't do a decent day's work if their bodies aren't fuelled - unless they've got some energy.

With the performing arts - the juggling - it's developing the opposite sides of their bodies. Your left hand's got to be as good as your right hand. Body mechanics - that translates into the building industry or mechanics: how you operate under a car.

There's initially a very strong resistance in the majority of cases to look at anything else. A kid comes in and says: 'I want to be a carpenter'. You usually find that that's the only trade that student knows of in the building industry, because dad might be a carpenter. They've never really had any exposure to anything else, especially the cooking for example. So we show them the benefits. We can show them the relevance of why it's good to learn to budget, why it's good to be able to prepare cheap and nutritious meals, why it's good to have a grounding in Occupational Health and Safety, even first aid practices - because that's what industry demands.

Once students have been here for a little while, we can start to open their minds to a point where they're willing to have a look. That's when we'll start to push them into different areas. When Carl first came in - no way ... you'd have to drag them in to sit down with him. Now, all of a sudden, he's made literacy and numeracy user-friendly - he's made them enjoyable - non-judgemental. Now the students are lining up to come to him.

Decision Making

Participants are encouraged to engage fully in all aspects of their work. They are involved in negotiating, planning, executing and evaluating their participation and the products of their labour. They identify their participation in this learning environment as meaningful and relevant.

We turn up in the morning, make coffee, and ask the instructor, John, what we'll be doing. We pick what we want to do. If you get sick of mechanics, you can help with lunch - or you negotiate with one of the other instructors to work with them for the day. You have to ask them. (Michael)

Decision-making is usually not a formal process, but is based on individual negotiation, and processes of small work teams - processes that mirror current best industry practice. Because tasks are real - getting a car going, building a wall, landscaping an area, re-designing their own workshop - there is a natural insistence on responsibilities to carry through tasks.

Decision-making is like 50:50. You make your own decision on what area you're going to be in and what you're going to do. Vihra makes decisions about whether you need to come here and what you're going to get out of the place. There's not really a lot of rules: just that sexual harassment's out the door. (Nick)

That shared decision-making is also extended to group responsibility for supporting participants.

If people are having trouble here, we talk about what we can do to help this person. Everybody sits down, the teachers put what they have to say, everyone puts in what they have to say. And the students make the rules. (Bandit)

BANDIT

I started here recently - at the start of term 3. I wanted to be a mechanic in the first case - before I came here. I've been working on cars since when I was younger.

A teacher from another school referred me to come here. When I came in, I liked it straight away, and wanted to be here. My parents liked it too. The instructors are not teachers, they're friends. If you need help, you ask. But really, I don't class this as school; it's a work place.

When you come here, they ask you what you want to do. If you don't know, that's OK - sometimes they put you on a trial basis in woodwork or art or motor mechanics.

You don't have a timetable as such. The only timetable you have is for washing up - you're rostered on.

I want to be a mechanic: I want to work on cars. I'm actually good at mechanics and woodwork, so if I don't get an apprenticeship in mechanics, I could do woodwork.

I just take it day by day.

The Program

While the Island program is workshop based, with a specific focus on developing workplace attitudes, skills and knowledge through skill-based programs, there are also educational extensions in literacy and numeracy, computing, physical education, camps, nutrition and health, performing arts and so on. There are weekly sessions from a juggler and from a chiropractor who run sessions on the body. Daily lunch preparation is an opportunity for practical instruction in health and nutrition, as well as being important for the development of responsibilities in preparation, cooking and cleaning.

Individual Programs

Students often come to the Island with very specific interests in mind. The starting point for negotiation of an individual program is on what students can do and what their interests are - not their negative experiences or their past behaviour:

In this regard, the Island operates in isolation from students' past. Empowering - I suppose that's what it really is. It's a natural consequence of how the interaction goes on. (Annie)

These expressed interests are also seen as **just** a starting point for further challenges. Vihra, the Island Coordinator, describes the process:

Students might come in and say they want nothing more than mechanics, but then find that opportunities open up in other areas. The move from one to the other is helped by the 'transparency' of the shop floor. Everything's visible. The next place should be a warehouse again - keep it open. The kids don't have to go into somebody else's area, knock on the door - they can just look across.

It's about creating a stage, putting in some props, and letting them manipulate the props, and then saying: 'You can put in your own props too.'

The challenges also include placement in a variety of work settings - formal work experience, placement in TAFE Certificates of Occupational Studies programs, volunteer work in community settings. These may be developed specifically for particular participants, or offered generally to the Island and then advertised to all participants.

For most students, the Island sees eventual placement in an apprenticeship or a TAFE course - or, in a few cases, return to 'regular' secondary education - as its goal. But this might take some time, with students trying out one option, returning to the Island, then developing further options. This exploration is seen as part of the natural educational process.

Vihra notes:

If you push them in too fast - and this is something we've learnt - they don't succeed, and that adds to the sense of non-success.

and Steve adds:

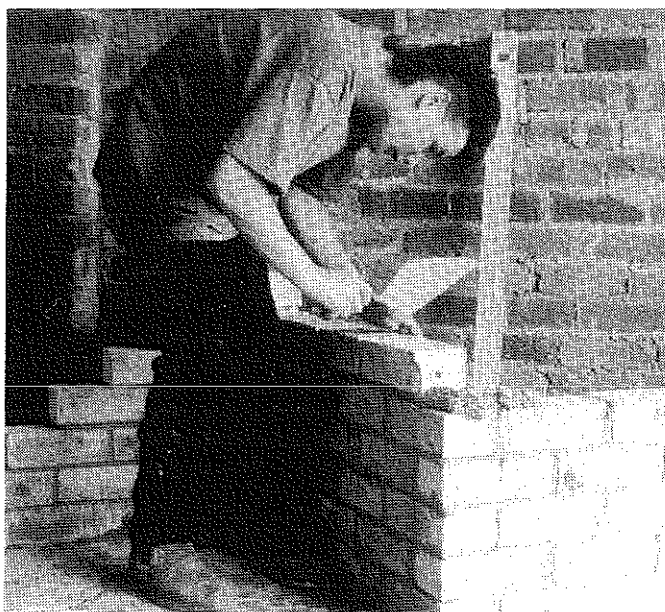
Some have moved on earlier than I think we should have let them, but hindsight's a wonderful thing. But the opportunities arose, and it was too good to miss. Some of them succeeded and some of them didn't do as well as we would have liked.

Annie also notes:

I don't see any point in chasing positions and apprenticeships in areas that kids are going to end up not enjoying. That's merely clearing our books. Kids aren't always going to end up doing what they start out doing - that goes for everybody. But you don't put them into a dead-end either.

Though individual programs are negotiated directly with students, their initiation (and the development of strategies that lie behind these programs) emerge from extensive staff discussion and debate. Annie describes occasions:

when we've felt that we've needed to take a different approach - across the board. Somebody might be the front-runner on it - they're the one having most impact - but it's supported by others.





'Teaching' at the Island

Teaching at the Island means the development of new approaches and skills. The mixture of staff with school and industry backgrounds provides both exciting diversity and challenges.

Annie comes to the Island with a substantial history of classroom teaching and curriculum support:

As a teacher, this place enables you to leave a lot of the practices behind that you never were comfortable with. It frees you up to be how you would have liked to have been in the classroom.

Kids going off and doing all sorts of things - it's out of our control. But that's what we've set up. You wait and observe, but you try and hold back. You don't hold hands too much.

She also recognises the different student perceptions of the instructors with industry background, and also how this interacts with 'gender politics':

Steve talks like a bloke that's been on the work-site. He'll stand round with a group, and they'll watch him. He'll talk about a bit of chip-board, and they're intent on that information.

But the common thing is the kids - and the commitment to them.

Steve doesn't come from a formal teaching background - he's careful to say that he's an 'instructor', not a 'teacher'.

How do I teach? I describe it as 'learning by doing' - touching it, feeling it, pulling it apart, putting it back together - learning by experience.

Often I am setting up a challenge, but in other cases, we're trying to put the onus onto the students. We say: 'You want to work in the woodwork area. You go home tonight and look around the house - is there anything you need around your house?' We try to get them to have total ownership, so that all we need to do is act in a teaching or supervisory capacity, to lead them through their projects. If I said, 'We're going to build this coffee table', some might get hooked in, but others won't, because they don't have that feeling of ownership of it - it's not their idea.

It's very much one-to-one or in very small groups. It's where the individual's at, his abilities and what his attitude is. In other areas, you'll slowly start to build the team component.

The students perceive - positively - the informality of the teacher/instructor-student relationship, and of the methods of learning:

It was a little weird at first. People would call everyone by their first name, and I'd still be saying 'Sir'. Here it's a big family - everyone's more equal. I enjoy working with John: he's a very good teacher. (Harry)

Outcomes

The Island looks to a range of measures of its effectiveness - changed attitudes to learning, to doing and taking instruction; improved abilities to working independently, to participating as a member of a team, to taking responsibility for actions, to setting goals and achieving objectives.

STEVE

Background

Steve was a construction site manager, building schools, police stations, hospitals. His history, from age 15, is through the building industry; he worked his way from labourer up to site management.

A consultant architect, employed for renovations of a rooming house, turned out to be a supporter of the Island because of his work at RMIT. He mentioned the Island to Steve and talked about what they were trying to do.

Coming to the Island

The Island was looking for someone with building skills, because they wanted to rebuild (after the fire). Steve contacted Vihra and had a talk about what the Island did. The Island was looking for someone to reorganise the rebuilding, but at the same time, to give the students some building skills.

There was a long series of interviews with staff. "I understand now that it wasn't just the building skills that were needed," said Steve. "It was my values, what sort of person I was, whether these kids would be able to work with me, would I be able to work with them."

The more they spoke about it, the more Steve was interested - in the end, he was fighting to get the job.

"I've trained a few apprentices in my time, and I've related well to the apprentices," said Steve. "I've enjoyed sharing the love of building with them."

Steve reflected on his first introduction to the Island. "I couldn't describe the place when I came here. There was a bit of everything - one minute I was on the shop floor, the next I was down the park playing football with them. It's wide and varied."

How The Island Works

Up to now, a lot of these boys have worked strictly on their own project. But the need recently was to rearrange the working area. Steve said, "This is what I want to be able to do in here. How are we going to do it? You come back to me: I'm going to act as your client. You organise it and come back to me for approval." Students had to put their heads together and compromise and negotiate their own ideas. They're fulfilling those criteria - they're doing it.

The Island had a project at the Collingwood Children's Farm - fencing, gates, maintenance work. There was a project at Dunstan Reserve in West Brunswick, where the local Council, with the local community, wanted to put in a community garden. The residents were mainly retired or elderly people - there was no way that these people were physically equipped to do the manual work involved. The landscape architects said the Island was welcome to any component of that work that they wanted.

"We went in with plans, and constructed all the fencing around the community garden, brick retaining walls. We dug the trenches, tied the steel, poured the concrete, laid the bricks, did all the ordering of the timber, the cutting, the erection - everything. The students all did their own plans. They had to estimate it, get the prices, do the orders. There was the learning exercise: literacy, numeracy, communications - which is very important. That went very well. There was no budget allocated for the labour component of what we did - it was us working for the local community."

It was a teaching exercise for the students. They get to experience building a retaining wall, the hand tools that are involved, the setting out, the ordering, the estimating, the negotiating with the client. They're involved in every aspect.

Outcomes

Steve comments: "My hopes for the students are that they'd go back to learning, perhaps moving into the TAFE system, where they're going to expand on the basic skills that we've given them in a certificated area." The biggest thrill is to see students move into an apprenticeship, especially in the building trades. There are now career paths through the building industry from being a labourer through to project management.

"These kids are very capable of moving on to that. They don't see it at this stage, but an apprenticeship gets them into a trade, where they're going to continue learning. They'll also be exposed to other areas of the industry, where they are able to move into so many offshoots. If you've got a trade, you can move into mature age education based on your experience."

"Recently one of our students started his apprenticeship as a bricklayer. He's able to go on site on his first day and mix up a batch of mud for the brickies, he knows where to position the bricks (there is a certain standard way of stacking the bricks so they don't fall over), he can lay a brick to a line, he can set up a string line - he can work from day one. The students leaving here are as good as any of the students who have completed a pre-apprenticeship program. They've got the same basics."

"The same with mechanics. Within an hour they've got a spanner in their hand, and they're working on some piece of mechanical machinery. Our philosophy is: they're into it straight away. As long as it's safe - complies with Occupational Health and Safety Regulations - and there's worth in it, we'll try it. The biggest things are the learning exercise and the safety aspect of it. We try and train them in the lines of industry."

Achievements to date indicate an 80% success rate in students undertaking apprenticeships, traineeships, TAFE programs, employment or return to schooling.

For example, in 1993, 4 students took up apprenticeships, 11 entered TAFE courses, 6 found employment and 3 returned to schools; 25 returned to the Island at the start of 1994. During 1994, 20 students have left so far, with 4 of these taking apprenticeships, 3 entering TAFE, 8 finding work, 3 creating employment and 2 re-entering schools.

The Island continues to take a direct and formal interest in students after they leave. Continuing support is offered during work and course placement, with staff available to visit, advise and support students, negotiate with and for them, and assist with learning tasks.

In all cases, they're still Island students. For example, the students at RMIT still come back and we still visit them. That pastoral care is still very important. A student on work experience is visited once a week, we speak to the employer, the student can call us if there's any issues or problems.

It's explained to the staff and the coordinators there, that we are available if there are any issues, and they should get straight on the phone to us. So there is a lot of extra work involved. Once they go out, we just don't get rid of them. Even Lee, who got an apprenticeship - he came in on Monday. We said, "If you need any help, come back into us or give us a call; when you start your trades school or anything you're stuck with, we can help you with that. You're still not on your own." You're letting the apron strings out little by little until the point where they're going to run on their own. (Steve)

Interest, enthusiasm, experience - and the confidence to try new things. One family wrote to the Island:

He came to the Island with one aim and that was to become a motor mechanic. Nothing more or less was he going to accept. Through your program he had the opportunity to develop his mechanical skills by getting true hands-on experience without the added pressure of subjects that he thought were beyond his learning ability, only because he was not confident enough to try to learn them. It was a complete surprise to us when he told us that he had changed his mind and that he might like to try for a different trade. You gave him the opportunity to try bricklaying without questions or pressure. At the same time he has worked on occasions as a plumber's labourer - something he never wanted to be, and found that he quite enjoys the work. The trade world is opening up for him and he has become more and more confident that he will be able to pick up an apprenticeship eventually.

His attitude towards us has changed considerably... All round, the family is much happier and it is great to see (him) achieving personal success.

In 1993, the Island was awarded the Prince of Wales Perpetual Trophy for 'Outstanding Services to the Community'.

CONTACT

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NICK

I've been here about eight months. I was going to a school, and they told me about the Island. I had a visit and a look around the place and thought: 'Ooh, I don't know', but then found out it was for me. It looked a little small and a bit rough. It doesn't look like a school at all. It's like a workshop.

I'm the motor-bike section, and light engines. I want to be a motor-bike mechanic. Sometimes I do bricklaying, or cars or a bit of woodwork. I'd only switch round if Martin (the instructor) wasn't here. Otherwise, I'm doing motorbikes full time - unless there's something to be welded, I do that.

There's a lot of difference at this place. You don't do a lot of English and work like that - it's all working with your hands. The instructors here are like friends - you can actually tell a joke to them. You work on your things, not someone else's. You make up your own mind.

I'm learning a lot - all sorts of things: welding, motor bikes. I've got a welder at home, and I've done a bit at home. But Martin has showed me the proper way to hold it, and things like that.

I'm selling my bike, so I wrote this (advertisement) out, and Martin's going to help me write out a better one. I wrote out what I'd like to be in here - then he wrote out the right spelling. It's English, but not like school. It's because I wanted to do this, not that someone made me do it.

I hope I'm going to get an apprenticeship next year. I'm really going to look hard. I want to be a motorbike or jet-ski mechanic - a light engine mechanic.

The best thing about the Island is that you get to make up your own mind.

HARRY

I've been here a bit over two months. I was at school but not really into school work - I was more interested in working on cars. A teacher said: 'There's this place called the Island, not far from here, which specialises in more technical work, more hands on.' I came and checked it out, I was accepted, came on a two-day trial, and I'm here.

At the moment I'm working on a Datsun. The diff's gone. I'll have to chase around and find another one - get quotes. I'm thinking about buying a car and bringing it here to fix it, and then sell it.

I know about motors - how to pull them apart, not too well about how to put them back together again. I messed around with my cousin's car a few times - I watched, and slowly I picked things up. Here, it's the same. If you don't know something, you ask John - he'll show you what to do.

There are other things that happen - we have Phys Ed in the mornings and on Mondays, there's this person who comes in to tell us about our bodies and stuff like that.

I'd like to get an apprenticeship. I've seen people finish University, and they're still waiting for a job at home. This way it'll be better. This place gets you ready. It's a real good place and I like it a lot.

MYUNA FARM, DOVETON

Myuna Farm is a City of Berwick development project situated on 50 acres of tranquil farmlands and wetlands, in the middle of outer eastern Melbourne suburbia between Dandenong and Doveton.

As well as offering an exciting retreat for local students and a range of learning environments for local school curriculum, the Farm is also keen to develop ways for meaningful participation by students in valued community activities. These include aspects of the Farm's maintenance and development, and also use of the Farm's facilities by students in their own research and in broader community action.

A working party of interested teachers from surrounding schools have designed several suggestions for long-term projects for students. For example, schools can hire a community garden plot, adopt an island in the wetlands to develop, or participate in an elective on animal husbandry.

Learning Activities

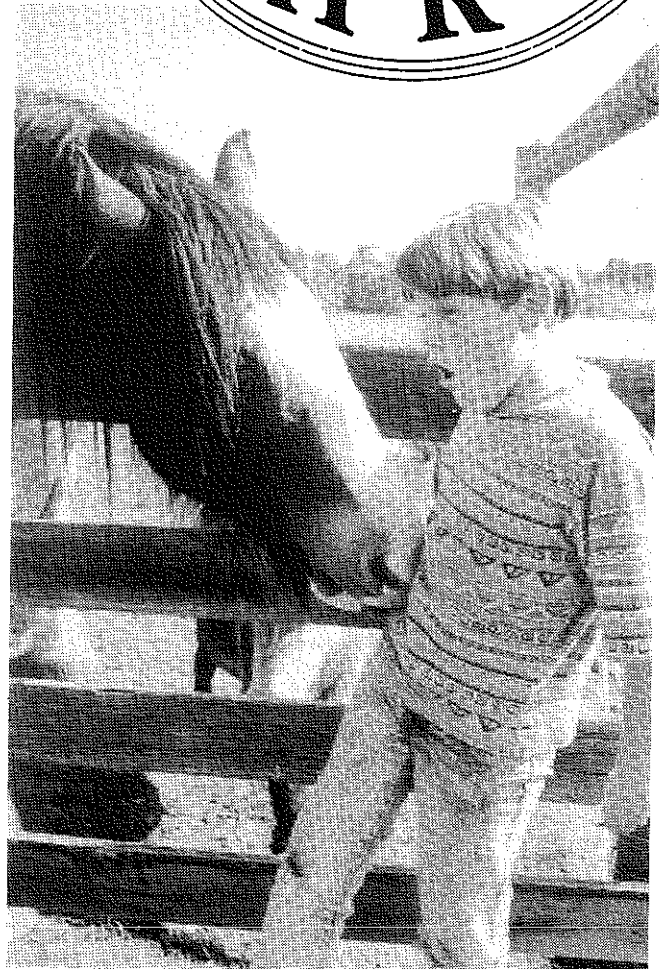
Myuna Farm's Education and Activities Officer has recently produced a range of materials to assist schools in using the Farm as part of their teaching program. A Teacher Resource Kit and several Before the Excursion Kits have been prepared for preps to grade 6s on topics such as 'Farming and You', 'Recycling', and 'Land Use and Conservation'.

A new education centre with a giant hay stack, miniature wetlands housing lizards and tortoises, issues tanks and touch tanks has been opened this year. Several local Principals have also conducted staff professional development meetings at Myuna Farm.

Several schools are now developing a six-week (half-day per week) hands-on program to introduce students to a range of farm experiences. These are used both as a general incentive for students, and as specific stimuli for further discussion, writing and other educational development. Grapevine, the community newsletter from schools in the area, outlines the approach:

"Sixteen grade 4, 5 and 6 students from Eumemmerring Primary School and Doveton Heights Primary School have recently completed a six week **elective in Animal Husbandry** at Myuna Farm. The program provides the opportunity for 'hands on' learning in an atmosphere that is exciting and very different from the average classroom.

"The elective has provided students with a basic knowledge of cows, rabbits, guinea pigs, horses, sheep and pigs. Children actively learn about the needs of animals and how to care for them. The students also gain an appreciation of and caring attitude towards animals."



The students study a different farm animal each week. Videos are used as teaching aids and the students complete some written work on each visit. There is also a great deal of active learning through participation in practical farm demonstrations.

Active Participation

While the farm provides an educational environment for students that is being utilised and enjoyed by many young people, it is planning to go beyond this. The Farm is now devising approaches through which students can become valued contributors to this community resource as they learn from it.

In some of the approaches that have been initiated, students take responsibility for aspects of the farm's operation. For example, Myuna Farm is the site for a special teaching unit catering for eight students with special learning needs. These students, as part of both the Farm's daily program and of their learning program, carry out daily checks on the animals, filling in report sheets for the Farm about their condition, needs and so on. The students work alongside Farm staff in liaising with visitors, maintaining facilities and caring for the animals.

It is also hoped that neighbouring schools will be able to take responsibility for the development of particular areas of the Farm. For example, there are several islands in the wetlands area that are slowly being revegetated. Groups of students - perhaps a class - are being encouraged and supported to 'adopt' and develop such an island, in a project that will both develop a community resource, and will also contribute to their classroom learning.

LEAP

Similarly, the Farm hosts a Landcare and Environmental Action Program for 15 long-term unemployed young people (15 to 19 year olds). This provides opportunities for learning in a setting that both creates ongoing community resources, and also possibilities for employment generation for young people.

Park benches, deer sheds, yabbies, trees, dams, plumbing and hothouses are all components of this City of Berwick program, which is run at Myuna Farm and at Wilson Botanic Park. The 15 unemployed young people have been digging, hammering and drilling a variety of things over the 26 week duration.

Designed to give them a range of skills in the horticulture field, the program has concentrated on the following projects:

- landscaping and re-vegetating at Wilson Botanic Park;
- building a large hothouse;
- constructing a deer handling shed;
- designing and building a yabby farm;
- designing, building and installing park benches.

The LEAP program not only provides the participants with practical skills - they also undertake a range of TAFE subjects, and it gets people used to what 'horticulture and landscape' work is like. It is also a program in which participants exercise a large degree of cooperative decision making about program directions, and about possibilities for the development of further individual and group work-related initiatives. Previous programs have had over 70% of participants returning to work or further education.

The City of Berwick is committed to helping young unemployed people. It is about to start another LEAP program, this time in the performing arts.

Myuna Farm currently offers a variety of opportunities, and is keen to explore ways in which students can become even more active participants in real work and learning around this community resource.



*For further information
on these education
programs and on
excursions to Myuna Farm,
contact Sharon Nicola on
(03) 706 9944.*

*Myuna Farm is at
182 Kidds Road
Doveton 3177
(Melways Map
Reference 90-H7)*



LITERACY CAMP

At the beginning of the year, we noticed that some students at our school lacked basic skills in maths and literacy. A meeting of integration teachers and aides discussed these students' lack of confidence in these areas and thought it would be a good idea to introduce a program to help them. When we began to isolate these students, we felt many year 8, 9 and a few year 10 students would benefit from this kind of support.

We had read of Nathalia Secondary College's success with running a Literacy camp (see **Connect** #77-78, 81, 82, 84) and we thought we could do the same for our own students. We could see some benefits in having the students away from their regular school environment and giving them a feeling of being worthy of special attention. We were aware of these students' disruptive and attention-seeking behaviour in their classes and needed to interact with them in a more positive way.

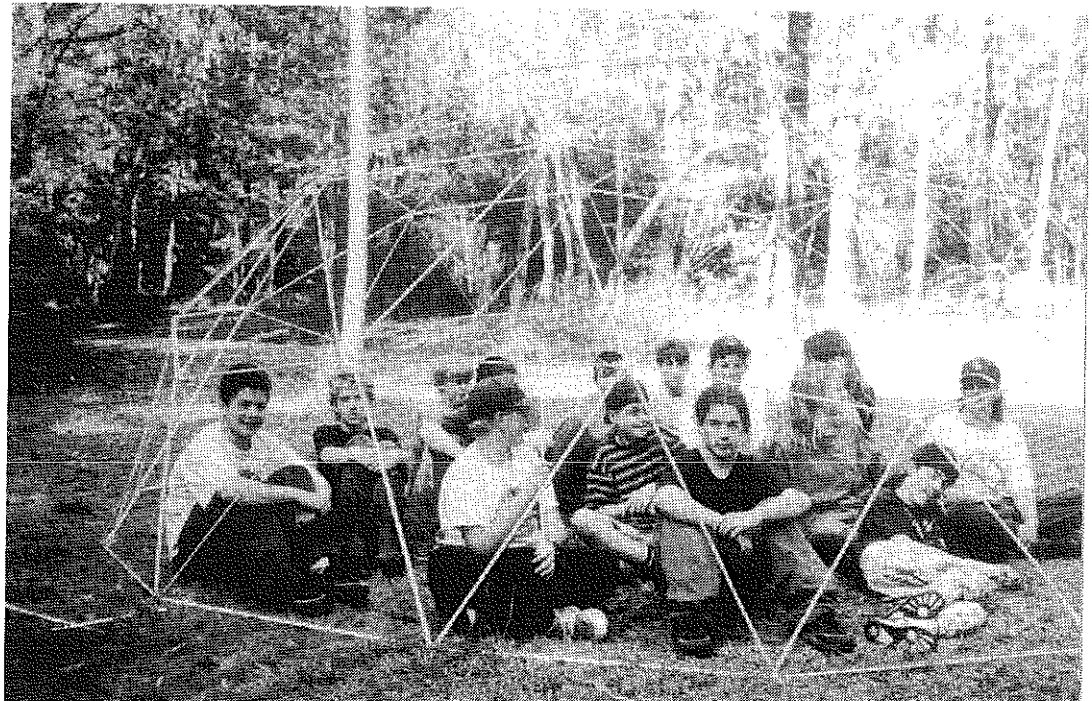
Our experience of camps is that the activity makes students feel special and the day-to-day running of the camp gives teachers a chance to relate to their students in a different way - other than as a classroom teacher. We discussed with the whole school staff which students should attend the camp and asked them to name students whose skills they were concerned about. From this we had a list of about thirty students - one third of our school population!

The Maths and English teachers from the Integration Committee began to explore who could help with the programs that we needed to make these students feel they were able to learn. Pam Hammond from the Directorate of School Education recommended that we contact Judy McDonald from Upper Yarra Secondary College, who could run some activities for our students to help them with their numeracy skills.

Charles Lovitte made available a dome kit, some problem solving kits and a three-way tug of war for Birsin to use with students to develop confidence with maths concepts. When working with the dome, we had two groups making a dome each - the object being to put the two together to form a sphere. One group which had some students with great spatial awareness and leadership skills had their group organised and they completed their dome. The other group worked as individuals without this leadership, and consequently they had great difficulty. Eventually, the first group helped the second group to complete the construction of their dome. However, trying to put the two halves together seemed an impossibility because the two hemispheres kept coming apart. Students had just as much fun pulling the thing apart as putting it together.

Judy McDonald provided activities involving angles in a circle, guessing hidden numbers by asking yes/no questions, estimating the speed of walking 100 metres, and bingo games. Judy also asked the students to arrange themselves in order of their birth date without speaking. Activities involving the guessing of a number pinned to their back meant they had to ascertain the number by asking "greater than" or "less than" questions.

Indoors, Judy then organised the groups to create four rectangles from an envelope of geometrical shapes. Each group member had to make their own rectangle and the group had to use all the pieces from their envelope. This activity was difficult for the



students, but once they had completed it with help, they were able to do it quickly and successfully with less support. We played Bingo with the students to finish off the Maths activities. Students loved this game and wanted to play it over and over again, especially if they weren't winning. According to the laws of probability all the numbers should have come up, but some students didn't believe that!

Initially, for our English work, we wanted an adult Literacy student to spend time at our camp and talk with students about how disabling the lack of writing and reading skills could be. We spoke with teachers from the support centre and one of these people had an adult student, but felt he would be too embarrassed to talk with students about his disability. He had been convicted of driving without a licence and had to attend adult Literacy classes as part of his rehabilitation. Although we were unable to have this man speak with our students, just hearing his story from June Hercules, his teacher, had a great impact on the students.

The teachers from the support centre were excited by the idea of our camp and volunteered their time from the centre to work on a number of Literacy skills for one morning of the camp. June Hercules told the story of her adult student, read the story of Red Jack and other poems to the students. She also discussed with the students about how they could take a simple nursery rhyme and use that rhythm to substitute their own names and words to tell their own story in a poetic form. The students enjoyed these activities and June held her story-telling outside in a log circle where all the students could be gathered together closely.

Sheryl ran writing activities. Students were led through a series of steps that enabled them to write their wills and to write longer pieces on their early school experiences at Primary level. This exercise not only helped students with their writing,

but also showed them that school from the very start had not been a good experience for them. Nearly all the students related negative responses to their first days and months at school. We had two integration aides plus three teachers helping students scribe these experiences and it was amazing to see how determined students were to tell their own stories. They soon forgot about checking their spelling, sentence structure and vocabulary skills when they saw their peers around them struggling to express themselves accurately. We were moved to see these students absorbed in all these activities and never, at any stage, did any of them try to duck an activity or wag a session.

A final successful session with the students was led by Julie who gave them ideas about how to resource their projects from the library using pictures as cues for the information content. This session was an empowering tool that helped the students see how they could gain access to information even though they had poor researching skills. After a successful activity-based Maths afternoon, I was concerned that a language session would be too passive and not stimulating, but the work the students did with June, Sheryl and Julie had them absorbed and concentrating on tasks they would never have attempted back at school.

It was not only the environment that was working its magic on the students, but the fact that they felt special and important enough to warrant the attention of all these interested people. The location of the camp was important too, because it provided the students with a peaceful, bush environment where they could put up their tents and virtually run amok if they needed to, without hurting anyone. The Yarra River was nearby and there was time for students to go fishing and explore the obstacle course. We also had access to a flying fox that challenged some students' fear of heights.

The flying fox was popular because it was high enough to warrant the wearing of a safety harness and students, attempting this for the first time, had to conquer fears and experience success in a short space of time. Only three students were unable to attempt the flying fox.

We thought it so successful that after discussion with the ranger at the park, we stumbled on the ideal follow-up activity for our Literacy and Numeracy camp.



We wanted to bring these students together again, but in a different context. A high ropes course would be a whole day activity that would further bond these students and put them in a situation where they would have to take risks, and experience fear and success. These emotions are feelings they experience every day in their Maths and English classrooms and we hoped that the overcoming of these feelings during a high ropes activity would further empower them to carry this through back at school.

After reading the reports of the Nathalia Secondary College experience of their Literacy camp, we decided we needed some bonding activities that provided tangible evidence of the students' camp. All the cooking and washing up was done by students and teachers together. A menu of pancakes, french toast and cereal for breakfasts, hotdogs and sandwiches for lunches and a BBQ, and macaroni with meat sauce for tea were all prepared on a volunteer basis. Students were encouraged to help out by offering their services for the preparation and washing up after a meal. This worked well and very few students had to be asked.

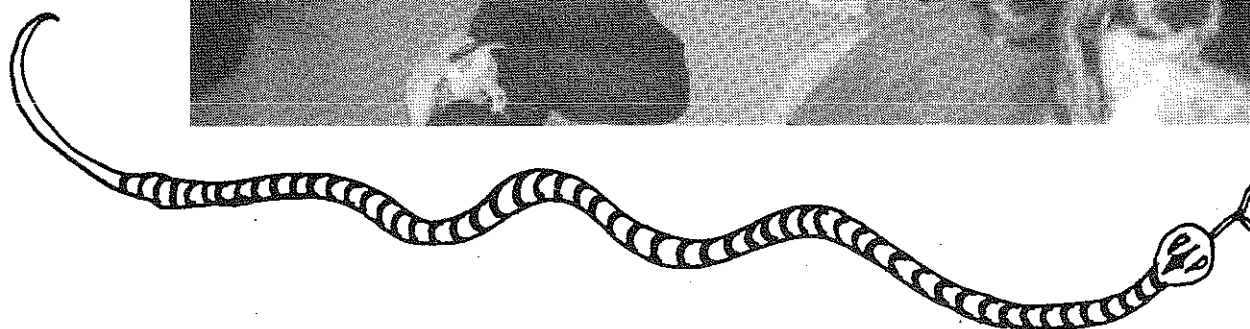
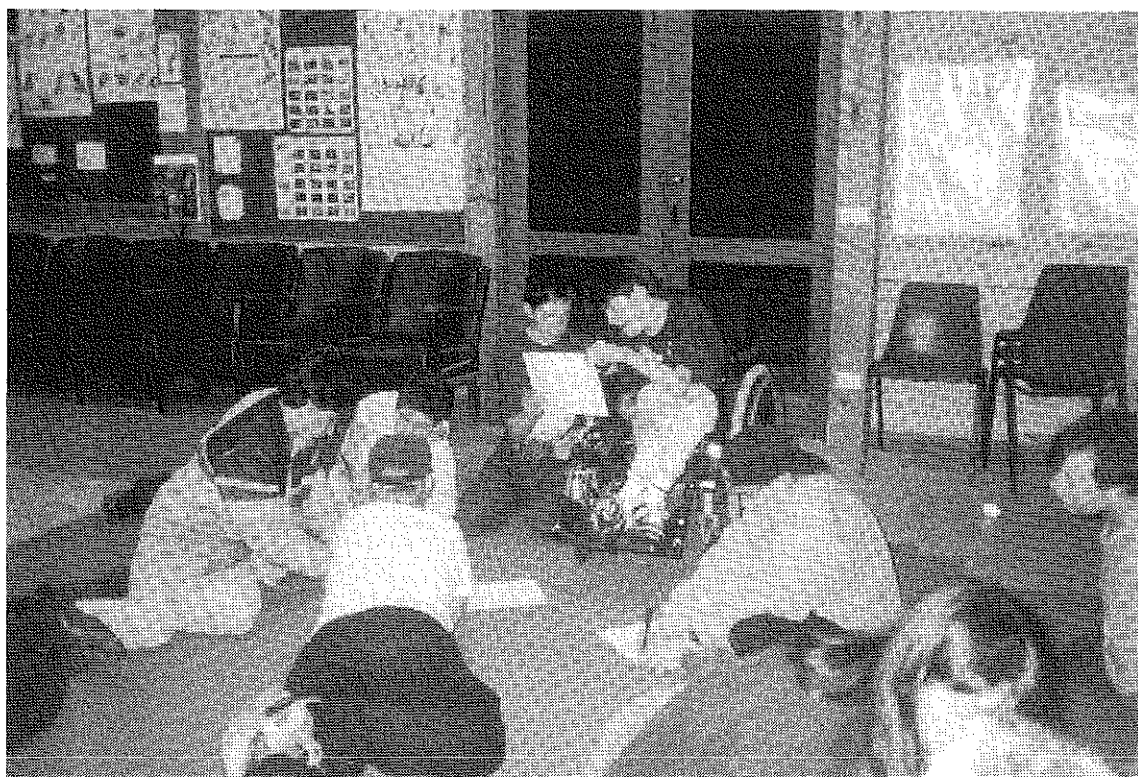
The school coordinator, Colin, and deputy coordinator, Bob, supported the camp from the very beginning. They spent time at the camp - cooking and staying the night. Colin ran a kite-making activity with the students on the last morning. This kind of

support from our coordinators gave the students strong messages of just how important we all considered the work they were doing was.

Lisa, our integration and art teacher, also devised a wonderful activity that was non-threatening and enjoyable to do. Each person on camp had a butterfly of their own which had to be coloured in and cut out. Everyone can colour in and cut out - even teachers! These butterflies fitted together in a tessellated pattern and together they formed a whole on a black background which we displayed back at school. Our cloud of butterflies looked beautiful and each person on camp settled down to do their butterfly when they felt like doing something quiet.

Our Literacy/Numeracy camp was a successful strategy to encourage students with poor skills to 'have a go'. Teachers have reported a change in the attitudes of these students in that they are not only attempting work requirements for these classes, but are wanting to complete their work requirements for a semester's work. As the teachers of these subjects, we have been most fortunate because we were able to form special relationships with students who were on the camp and were able to capitalise on these relationships in the classroom.

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Student Councils, Youth Programs and Critical Theory

as a Means of Improving Student Participation in Secondary Schools

In Australia, school principals have a high degree of autonomy. It is up to them to decide what they do about involving teachers, parents and students in decision making. A great deal of cynicism and apathy would exist if a facade of democratic governance is preserved while all the important decisions are taken elsewhere. This is likely to produce alienation. Considerable evidence indicates that students play a critical role in today's schools.

As Director of Student Support Services at The Hutchins School (1987-1989), I discovered that students can effect change in their schools and communities. Student councils can enrich students' lives. In addition to having a positive effect on students' success in school and later life, involvement in student activity programs influences how students think about themselves in terms of their ability to change things around them. Through involvement in student councils, students realise that they do matter and can change their world. When I asked students why student councils exist they said:

to be a communication tool - to teach leadership, scholarship, and citizenship - to identify problems - to solve problems - to improve attitudes - to promote democracy - to listen - to help kids adjust to school - to promote good public relations and good human relations - to develop school spirit - to teach young people through participation - to teach self-control.

Some of the criticisms levelled at schools in this era of reform have failed to acknowledge the vital importance of student activities, which frequently are led by student councils. These student activities help students find something of interest at school, which in turn cultivates a supportive school spirit and a commitment by students to their school and to learning.

Research commissioned by the National Institute of Education (*Reaching for Excellence: An Effective Schools Sourcebook*, 1985) reported that, among other significant variables, 'high levels of student participation' in extracurricular activities might be a factor in school success. These activities promote a school 'ethos' or a sense of social cohesion that gives support and direction to learning.

Joekel (1985) reports several important findings from current research involving co-curricular student activities. When researchers compared major achievements in co-curricular activities, high grades in school, high grades in college, and high scores on the American College Test, they found that 'the only factor that could be used to predict success in later life was achievement in extracurricular activities'. A study of the Scholastic Aptitude Test found that 'the best prediction of creativity in mature life was a person's performance during youth in independent, self-sustained ventures'. When students participate in school activities, they derive feeling of self-worth and self-actualisation, they learn useful skills, their social and emotional development is enhanced, and they become highly motivated. Leadership training, which an increasing number of schools provide for students involved in activities programs, also has direct benefits. Stiles (1986) describes a leadership training program in one school for fifteen high school girls who were elected to the student council. Through the program the girls developed greater self-confidence and leadership ability, and they assumed greater responsibilities in subsequent years.

Leatt (1987) states that a basic responsibility of schools is to provide learning experiences that will prepare students to fulfil their role as individuals capable of making intelligent decisions on personal, social, and political issues. 'The developing young adults in our schools are seeking an identity for themselves in relation to society. By promoting a wide range of school- and community-based activities, student councils provide a platform encouraging the development of skills and values needed to help students play their rightful role in society' (Leatt 1987: 4).

Keith (1972) says that 'the goal in all student council actions is to provide a significant learning experience ... for the student body at large.' The student council 'should enhance the atmosphere for learning in the school, and make school as meaningful as possible for as many students as possible'. Keith emphasises the people-centred reasons for having student councils: they help people learn, involve people in social processes, mediate between people,

and promote norms and values that form a healthy school culture. By virtue of their position as representatives of the student body as a whole, student leaders have a responsibility to see that their organisations and activities serve students effectively.

Leatt (1987: 5) explains: 'as student councils have grown in strength, they have been called upon to represent students to school boards, school faculty meetings, and school administrators. The potential of a student council in a school program is not limited to out-of-class activities.' As Wood (1967) argues, if we accept the premise that schools are committed to educating all children, then 'the only true purpose for having student councils in secondary schools is to work in concert with school faculty to provide a school atmosphere that is conducive to maximum learning by the maximum number of students'. Student councils must therefore closely identify themselves with this fundamental objective of schooling and seek to create a harmonious school atmosphere in which all the students have a sense of belonging and thus develop positive attitudes about themselves that contribute to the constructive use of school classroom instructional time.

School Activities, a 1983 publication of the New York State Education Department comments that:

the student activities program expands on what students learn in the classroom, develops students' personal interests, and augments formal instruction. Such a program provides extensive opportunities for personal growth and appeals to all students in the school. An effective student government must develop and coordinate the school activities program if the program is to be successful.

A school's curriculum consists of all activities that take place under its guidance and direction. Student activities are therefore inseparably part of the instruction that takes place at school. As the leading group supporting and promoting such activities, student councils should have their meetings during school time. This also means that participation on student councils should be counted as 'credit' for students and that the time teachers spend working collaboratively with them should be considered part of their instructional load. It is important to note that projects and activities are the means by which student councils reach their goals. Student councils must be careful to avoid sponsoring activities that seem to be nothing more than busy work. The worth and value of each proposed activity must be considered carefully, and the activities should reflect genuine interests, needs, and concerns of the students and the school community.

According to Maher (1985), student council activities should serve the self, the school, and the community. Maher says students can better themselves as they learn what kind of roles they are best suited for. As Director of Student Support Services at The Hutchins School, I articulated the

fact that student councils must aim to enrich the lives of students through teaching them that they don't have to be apathetic - that it is possible to be part of the world around them and that they can make change happen.

When the student council teaches students how to be effective, then the students' attitudes toward their school community change and they can see themselves as being effective. Student councils can have a vital part to play in the overall educational program of a school. By giving students a chance to feel that they belong and do make a difference and by promoting the self-worth of students, student councils can play a critical role in the quest for excellence in education. I believe students can and do make a significant difference in the life of schools when they are given the opportunity to exercise their talent and energy.

Commitment to a vision in which students can change the world and make it a better place to live for the present and for future generations is not an idle dream but a reality that gives hope for the future. You have got to recruit students, to train them, and then trust them enough to let them fail and succeed. Through this, students, I believe, learn that they can change their world into a better place. Student participation should therefore not be tokenistic, and it should not be conducted with students operating from positions of weakness or inferior status.

Apart from these concerns about the management of student participation, I have several others, which are also well documented in the literature. The first is that of broadening the base of student participation in schools. Student Councils, where they exist, usually involve small, often elite, groups of students. They sometimes operate more as leadership programs working for the benefit of the particular students involved, rather than as representative, participatory programs.

Even where there is a will amongst student council members to represent the views of their constituencies they often do not know how to do this, or have not been given the resources to allow them to try. The result is that even where school councils or student representative councils are effectively involving students, they are not involving many students. Members of student council often find themselves isolated from or ostracised by their peers.

Many students in schools have negative views of their student council, or are apathetic towards them. This leads to my second concern. How can we develop student participation so that it addresses the needs of students? How can students be given a voice so that their perceptions, no matter how seemingly trivial to others, can be taken seriously and debated? In my view much of what concerns students in schools are 'taboo' areas, involving the nature of the curriculum, student-teacher relations, or various school rules and conventions. These matters are usually off-limits for students in student council meetings or other discussion

forums. I see the achievement of student decision making and participation in everyday classroom situations as critical in rectifying this. The question is: how do you achieve these more difficult, yet more diverse and democratic forms of student participation?

Youth action programs have been used as a means of involving students. The report, **Student Perspectives on Truancy**, a students-as-researchers project (1984) is an example in question. It not only offers perspectives and information about the important social and educational problem generally referred to as 'truancy' but those who conducted the research and prepared the reports were secondary school students - many of whom were or had been 'truants'. The employment of students as researchers is not a new concept. It has a connection to other programs which have as their central motivation the notion of youth participation, youth advocacy or youth action. Programs based on this idea have operated in Victorian schools for some time (for example: see Knight 1980, Cole 1981, Holdsworth 1986 and Alder and Sandor 1990, to mention a few). As well as 'students-as-researchers' programs, a number of other activities like peer tutoring, peer support, drug education, student enterprise and vandalism prevention have been used as a means for youth participation, youth advocacy or youth action. What do such programs have in common?

The report, **Student Perspectives on Truancy** (1984: 1), answers this question. 'Youth action programs are by definition, concerned with youth policies that attempt to meet the needs of all youth, with the central focus being the development and implementation of policies that improve the quality of life for youth in our modern society'. Furthermore the report states that:

youth action programs in schools, such as this 'students-as-researchers' activity, attempt to develop or reinforce fundamentally different linkages between schools and studies. By creating roles which institutionally define students as competent and responsible, the bonds between the school and students are strengthened and students are more likely to acquire positive feelings about their role in society.

It was also recognised that such activities need to ensure that there are learning gains for the students they involve. Youth action programs are designed for youth and therefore youth must have a say in their operation. If young people are to be encouraged to take responsibility for tasks and acquire a sense of ownership of them, then purposes and activities should be negotiated and agreed upon. This does not mean that teachers and researchers give up their professional responsibilities as educators and social scientists - they need to be prepared to act as leaders and facilitators but not as directors. The approach adopted by the project meant, in simple terms, students were supported in 'being legitimate'. To the young person this means the chance to be useful, to be

competent, to belong, to be interested, to exert some meaningful and productive influence in an activity, to have a forum for involvement in social action and to be recognised by others for their efforts.

What about 'collective autonomy'? Is this a way of involving students? Henry (1992) states:

the notion of 'collective autonomy' in the context of educational practice implies, as I understand it, that teachers, students, parents, workplace educators, workers, consultants, academics and others involved in educational activities ... are capable of both identifying educational values and priorities and acting together to realise those values and priorities (Henry 1992: 1).

Henry (*op cit*) explains that collective autonomy has much in common with other definitions of participatory democracy. Williams (1983: 124) states '... the principle is, and the practice should be, that all decisions should be taken by those who are directly concerned with them'.

Horne (1992: 11) argues that 'we should take our citizens into the discussion ... instead of being dogmatic, why not raise discussion, have a think, and try to make it an intelligent public issue? We are supposed to be a democracy. We might start acting like one ...'.

Williams (*op cit*) saw democracy as self management, everyone having the means and power to look after their own affairs. Self-governing schools, the devolution of authority to those at work in schools, parent and student participation in school management are examples of what Williams meant by democracy in action.

Pitken and Shumer (1982) explain that:

the basic idea (of democracy) is simple: people can and should govern themselves. They do not need specially bred or anointed leaders, nor a special caste or class to run their affairs. Everyone has the capacity for autonomy, even quite ordinary people - the uneducated, the poor, housewives, labourers, peasants, the outsider and castoffs of society. Each is capable not merely of self-control, of privately taking control of his life, but also of self-government, of sharing in the deliberate shaping of their common life. Exercising this capacity is prerequisite both to the freedom and self-development of each, and to the freedom and justness of the community (1982: 43).

Should we apply the principles of critical theory as a means of improving student participation in secondary schools? Critical theory, derived from Habermas, has been applied to education by writers such as Carr and Kemmis (1986), and more recently as a rationale for student participation by Young (1990). Critical theory supposes that social situations, including social institutions such as education, can be improved through processes of critique, in which participants with vested interests can communicate and reach agreement without recourse to positions of power or status. Critical theory emphasises the emancipation of individuals as a primary concern of

social action. Critical theory is currently used as a conceptual vehicle to achieve more democratic practices in adult education, in the education of the aged, and in tertiary education as well as in secondary education. Student participation in secondary school setting can be enhanced by establishing opportunities for staff and students to share their perceptions of school life and culture.

Like Wilson (1994), I have come to the view that student participation practices are necessarily dependent upon the empowerment of teachers. Teachers need to be able to critique their own situations in schools and come to an appreciation of the necessity of democratic decision making for teachers in schools. Until this happens, it is unlikely that teachers will be prepared to extend forms of autonomy to students. Blackmore (cited in Henry and Rodostianos 1993: 22) states:

if the purpose of education is to produce socially aware individuals, capable of autonomous judgement and action, confident in participating in democratic processes and with a developed sense of community then ... teachers and students [must gain] control over their own situation.

Action research offers one method by which this kind of control may be achieved. I see action research as a process of empowerment. Action research centres on action as a basis for improvement of practice and increasing understanding about practice in a collaborating group. In our own school, we might see ourselves confronted by a common problem which could be addressed by a collective effort in research and reform. With action research, all decisions are made collaboratively by those who are engaged in the research task. Kemmis and McTaggart state:

action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (Kemmis and McTaggart 1992: 5).

In education, collective self-reflective enquiry can be used in school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs and in planning and policy development.

Kemmis and McTaggart (*op cit*: 53) outline the four 'moments' of the self-reflective spiral of action research: 'planning, action, observing and reflecting, on the basis of which participants can formulate new plans, new action, observation and reflection, and further replanning...'. Henry (1993: 10) explains that it involves participants in planning action (on the basis of reflection on their experience); in implementing these plans in their own action; in observing systematically this process; and in evaluating their actions in the light of evidence as a basis for further planning and action and so on through a self-reflective spiral. Action research has both an individual aspect and a collective aspect.

Action researchers change themselves and action researchers work with others to achieve change and to understand what it means to change. Shumsky (cited in Henry 1992: 3) describes an action research movement as:

a grass roots approach to the solution of community problems. It means activating the social and spiritual life of the community in a continuous search for self-improvement. It means providing a social setting where people can work together, dream together of a better community, and try to translate their dreams into the language of action and evaluation.

Henry (*op cit*) explains that: '... education action research projects based on democratic principles, or the presumption of collective autonomy, will begin by taking teachers, parents, students and other members of the school communities into the discussion of what should be done about particular educational issues (such as improving respect for human rights in and through schools, evaluating and reporting children's progress, or creating more authentic links between schools and their communities)'. Everyone in the school community can grow in both personal and professional ways by engaging in action research. This growth, however, can only take place in a certain climate, and whether or not this climate can be developed depends in large part on the value which is placed on teachers as reasoning professionals versus teachers as technical experts.

When we begin to act as reflective practitioners, rather than rely on technical experts, it poses a threat to the conservative system under which we work (Schon 1983: 332). Conflict and dilemmas surface, and this requires a 'learning system' within which these can be subjected to productive public enquiry. The system would need to be flexible enough to undergo continual restructuring of its principles and values. This implies that both administrative and collegial support is necessary to provide the 'safe' and supportive environment necessary for reflection, as not only may it involve additional demands on the teacher's and student's time, but a whole ethos where enquiry, curiosity and innovation are encouraged. It requires that teachers and students become willing to suspend judgement on a problem and sustain a state of uncertainty until all evidence has been explored.

Conclusion

A S Neill, in renouncing the powers normally invested in a headmaster, instituted a system of community-based decision making in order to make school life truly democratic. Democratisation has not been seen as a kind of progressive reform which can be incorporated into a system of schooling where curricula are imposed and students are supposed to be kept under control. This approach to education is conventionally justified on the grounds that children are immature; but taking responsibility away from

children is likely to make them immature. The ideology behind the present school system is based on the idea that students do not want to be in school, are not going to learn, and therefore someone has to make them. If you base a system on control rather than on interaction, the results are apathy, alienation and dropouts. This is not the kind of experience to prepare students for active democratic involvement either in school or in the larger community. According to Fraser (1988: 48) 'there is a need for radical change in the way schools are run if democracy is to be a reality in administration, or if the energy which can be released by teacher, parent, and student empowerment can be tapped as a means of school improvement'. Ways need to be found to include teachers, parents and students in the development of school policy and procedures.

Action research represents a practical means by which community development can be democratised,



a way in which teachers, parents and students can be enabled to participate in the development of their communities for the benefit of all.

Peter Carey

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NEWS AND REVIEWS

Youth Research Network

The Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne is currently developing an electronic network of youth research.

YARN (the Youth Affairs Research Network) will provide two levels of operation. First there will be an electronic Mailing List linking those carrying out or interested in research around issues facing young people. Access to this will be free (for those with e-mail). The list will be unmoderated - simply post queries, comments, answers, information, and this will be automatically transmitted to all list members.

The second level will involve a gradually accumulating database of recent, current and proposed research, information about forthcoming conferences and so on. A World Wide Web site has already been established, and can be investigated by those with access to the Internet.

For more information, including advice on modems and network access, contact YARN's Project Officer, Andrew Vanderstock at the YRC:

**YARN, Youth Research Centre
Institute of Education
The University of Melbourne
Parkville 3052**

Phone: (03) 344 8585; fax: (03) 344 8256

E-mail:

Andrew_Vanderstock@muwayf.unimelb.edu.au

Up2Date: Youth Participation

The July/August issue of the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition's monthly newsletter, **Up2Date**, contains a special overview of youth and student participation issues.

As well as a **Connect** perspective on student participation, there are articles on volunteering, on the Student Community Involvement Program (SCIP), and on young people as co-researchers. There are also discussions around issues of 'Towards Better Youth Participation' and 'Youth Participation or Youth Manipulation?'

The newsletter is available free to members of AYPAC. Contact them:

**AYPAC
PO Box 519
Dickson ACT 2602
Phone: (06) 241 8055; fax: (06) 241 8066**

Know Your Rights

Following the successful release of the Victorian and Queensland kits in June, the NSW version of **Know Your Rights At School** has now been distributed to NSW state secondary schools by the National Children's and Youth Law Centre (NCYLC).

South Australian, Western Australian and ACT kits were due to be completed recently. The Tasmanian and Northern Territory versions are still waiting on new legislation or policy documents.

For more information, contact:

**National Children's and Youth Law Centre
C/o University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052**

Phone: (02) 398 7488; fax: (02) 398 7416



Education Now Conference

The UK group **Education Now** is holding its postponed Conference at Bilston Community College on 22nd October. The Conference theme is: 'Democratic Education and Education for Democracy'. The Conference will also mark the launch of the Institute for Democratic Education's UK Office as a subdivision of **Education Now**.

For more information, contact **Education Now** at 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ or phone: UK: (0602) 257261.

Preston East PS JSC Radio

Preston East Primary School's Junior School Council radio broadcast is on every Tuesday at 12.15 pm while students are eating lunch. Three DJs operate through the office PA system. They conduct interviews with teachers, sports captains etc and invite guest DJs and story readers along.

The JSC collects broadcast sheets from the classrooms on Friday and work out the program together on Monday afternoons. They use a running sheet on the day of the broadcast. Incentives like bags of jelly beans are sometimes needed to encourage broadcast sheets to come in on time. The program has its own lead-in theme music and different songs are chosen by different classes each week as the closing music. The program requires a lot of organising and we have found it easy to stay with the same DJs, inviting guest DJs to provide variety.

NSW State SRC Conference 1994

The State Conference at Vision Valley commenced on Tuesday 9th August 1994. The Conference was based around a variety of keynote speakers, with follow-up group discussions and 'flexishops' on various issues concerning students today.

Ms Barbara Holborow, a former children's magistrate, gave a talk about how we, as students **can** make a difference in schools and society.

Kevin Gardner, HIV/AIDS curriculum advisor, and two other speakers delivered powerful speeches about their experiences with the HIV/AIDS virus. The male guest speaker, who is HIV positive, told us of the way he has handled his life so far, and what he is looking forward to in the future. The female guest speaker spoke of her 'new family' experiences since she adopted two twin boys, one of whom is HIV positive.

The flexishops I attended, on sex-based harassment, disabilities, quality learning, and drugs and young people, were all thoroughly enjoyable. These were areas that I had little or no knowledge in, so I enjoyed attending them so as to find out a little more about each one. All presenters were of high quality, and were full of information and advice.



The Forum and Formal Debate on recommendations was very much a learning experience. This was definitely the business side of the week, and the most formal. It involved the discussion of most recommendations made by regions. Unfortunately, however, due to limited time, not all 15 were addressed.

Night sessions included a Trivia Night to test our general knowledge skills, a performance of a prepared skit from each region and, on the final night, everyone enjoyed the Dance Party.

The final keynote speaker for the week was Steve Carfino, a former basketball player and now a TV sports presenter. He spoke of his involvement in the campaign: Different Colours, One People.

The week concluded with morning tea and lots of teary goodbyes to new friends.

State Conference was a great learning experience and always had a hyped-up feel to it. I recommend it to everyone interested.

*Melanie Moore
Year 11, Boorowa Central*

NSW State SRC Report to the State Conference

The State SRC represents each Region in NSW. Two representatives from each Region meet four times a year. At these meetings they voice opinions, and discuss concerns which are of issue in their Regions. This committee of 20 students from across the State is the body which represents all SRCs in NSW. The State Conference of 1991 recommended the formation of a State SRC. An interim State SRC was formed in 1992, which drafted a constitution. The constitution was approved by SRCs in each Region, the Director-General of Education and the Minister.

What happens at the State SRC?

A formal meeting is conducted. Representatives receive correspondence, decide on responses and discuss issues of importance to students. The chairperson is rotated so that each Region has the opportunity to chair the meetings. The chairperson sets the agenda and the secretary provides minutes of the meeting, which are sent to each Region.

What have been the achievements?

The four meetings held in 1993 were really the first four meetings of the SRC State body. The State SRC has begun to gain recognition as the representative body for students in NSW. The NSW SRC was invited by the Minister for Education, Mrs Virginia Chadwick, to a special lunch reception for the International Advisory Committee in August, to represent the students of NSW public schools. Requests for student opinion about School Planning, Quality Assurance School Reviews and Girls' Education Strategies have been made by the Quality Assurance Directorate.

Problems facing the SRC?

The largest problem facing the SRC is finding ways to effectively represent all students in the State. This is a big state and it is expensive to transport representatives to meetings. Communication between meetings tends to be low because of this.

Another difficulty is the small number of meetings and the fact that, each year, a new group of representatives forms the committee. This means a time for learning is required for each new Committee.

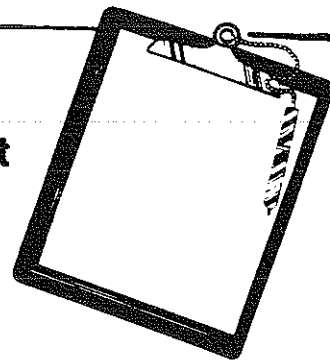
The future of the State SRC

The current representatives on the State SRC hope to establish the NSW State SRC as a stable organisation which represents students of all ages throughout the State. This will ensure that recognition is earned for the work of SRCs and student opinion recognised and valued. In the future, perhaps a nationwide SRC will develop.

*NSW State Committee
Report to the 1994 NSW State SRC Conference*



Junior School Council Report



Discussed:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

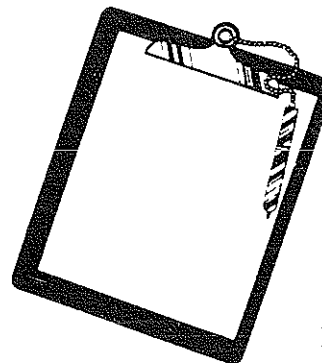
Class teacher: _____



Junior School Council

Items to be discussed at next J.S.C. meeting from grade _____.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



CLEARINGHOUSE

Local and Overseas Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can't lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on (03) 489 9052 or (03) 344 8585:

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

JSC District Magazine (Preston/Reservoir JSC Network, Vic) Term 3, September 1994
Always My Best (Preston NE PS, Vic)
School Magazine (Preston NE PS, Vic) No 1, June 1994

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:

Let's Live (Suicide Prevention Australia, NSW) Vol 2 No 2, June/July 1994
Network News (Surry Hills, NSW) Sept 1994
Education Links (Stanmore, NSW) No 48, Winter 1994
Options (Youth Bureau, ACT) September 1994
Curriculum Perspectives (ACSA, Belconnen, ACT) Vol 14 No 3, September 1994
Youth Australia (Australian Youth Foundation, Sydney, NSW) No 2, 1994
Fourth Annual Report (Australian Youth Foundation, Sydney, NSW) December 1993
Up2Date (AYPAC, Dickson, ACT) Vol 2 Nos 9, 10, June, July/August 1994
Youth Gathering '94 Program (AYPAC, Dickson, ACT) 7-9 July 1994

Rights Now! (NCYLC, NSW) Vol 2 No 3 August 1994

Yakka (Australian Red Cross, East Melbourne, Vic) Second issue, 1994

Youth Issues Forum (YACVic, Fitzroy, Vic) Winter 1994

Overseas:

Education Now (Nottingham, UK) No 5, Autumn 1994

AERO-Gramme (AERO, New York, USA) No 13, Autumn 1994

Foxfire News (Foxfire Fund, Georgia, USA) July/August 1994

Foundation Update (NIE, ANPA, USA) Vol 20 No 1, Summer 1994

Communication Research Trends (St Louis, USA) Vol 14 Nos 1 and 2, 1994

Documents

The documents listed in this column are of general background value or otherwise not appropriate for reproducing in the columns of **Connect**. However they are available on photocopy for research purposes. The length and cost (copying and postage) are listed. Please order by code number. (A full computerised list of documents is now available for \$3; this can be accessed and organised by topic, key-words etc.)

Code Description/Pages/Cost

414	NSW State SRC Conference documents	9 pp; \$0.90
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<= JSC REPORTING SHEET

On the opposite page is the first draft of a reporting sheet developed by the Junior School Council at Reservoir East Primary School, Victoria.

The top half of the form is completed by each representative at the end of the JSC meeting; these are the notes that remind the representative about what is to be reported to the grade.

The bottom half of the sheet is to collect items that the grade wishes to raise at the next JSC meeting. The JSC representative completes these after class discussion. The JSC has talked about various ways of running group discussions in the grades to make this task easier.

The JSC at Reservoir is trying this form out and will report in a future **Connect** about how it works.

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The number on your **Connect** label tells you the issue with which your subscription expires. Please renew promptly - renewal notices cost us time and money!

ACSA Conference

The 1995 national conference of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) will be held in Melbourne between July 11th and 14th, 1995. The Conference theme is *Reconstructing Curriculum: Choosing the Future*. Watch for further information in **Connect** and elsewhere, particularly on plans for student participation in the conference.

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• A Foxfire Christmas (Doubleday hardcover) (\$25) \$

• Shining Moments - Foxfire video (1 hour) (loan for 1 week: \$5) \$

• SRC Pamphlets Set (6 pamphlets; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) (\$5) \$

• Photocopies of the following documents:

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